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Scale How, Ambleside, UK, 2009

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SUGGESTIONS ON THE TEACHING OF SELF-RULE.

BY MISS MILLER.

THE word "education," so long and actively current amongst us, expresses ideas differing widely from each other. True educationists will, however, agree that their work should include the training to self-rule, as indeed an essential part of it, all teaching, however excellent in itself, being absolutely valueless in its absence.

Theorists are forward in maintaining this, and practical teachers are grievously over-weighted in the vain endeavour to get on without it, while critics of all classes, looking to results, and conscious of grave deficiency somewhere, blame both parties, without throwing much, if any, helpful light upon the great work needing it.

How does the case really stand? Where are we in education—how near to, or how far from, a true ideal and sound practice in it? And if, after all that has been said and written, still too far from the true mark, where is the chief defect, and how should it be remedied? What is theoretically right cannot be practically wrong, and *vice versa*. If theorists are mistaken in the stress laid by them on moral training, let us convince them of their error by good results otherwise obtained, or, on the other hand, supposing truth to be on their side, follow their lead, and seek to work out their ideal.

Why, indeed, should we shrink from adopting the higher aim for the basis of actual work? If at all practicable, there can be no question but that it would bring the greatest possible relief to teachers, while admittedly educating pupils in the truest sense of the word. It is surely, then, well worth consideration, to say the least, and in giving this, we can keep our eyes wide open, all the same, for the detection of possible flaws.

The region we have to traverse is strangely unfamiliar, but

the ground is firm, and the footing not really difficult, as we find at once on taking the children at their own pace. One of the first facts that meet us at the start is the largely negative and passive character of the good conduct we hope to secure through attention to self-rule. If our children will simply learn to keep their tongues and their fingers in order, just so far as to *avoid misuse* of both, an invaluable accomplishment is secured, though at (comparatively) very small cost to themselves. Our plan of trusting so exclusively to external rule has hitherto thrown this important fact into the shade, but it will be seen to mean much indeed, looking to actual work. The task of keeping others in order involves a constant strain, usually serious, often very hurtful; but if also needless, as we begin to see, why not ease matters by putting each child (in due measure) in charge of itself? Willing as we may be to take our full share of the burden, we all feel that pupils should "put their own shoulders to the wheel," and learn to work well and heartily. So far, good; but the nature of work, as suited to each party, has to be well considered also. This has been done but very imperfectly as yet.

Simple obedience should be taught—and learnt—at an early stage in a child's life, and those who are wisely ordered will acquire a rich store of good habits in that way; but no plan of external rule will meet all exigencies as the faculties develop, and the sooner, therefore, the higher principle can be initiated and set to work, the better it will be.

The problem is in many ways complicated for those of us who seek to educate the masses. Obedience has not been taught, bad habits have been formed, good ones neglected, and cunning asserts itself too often in place of childlike simplicity; while, in the face of all this, we find that the directors of our work lay the main stress on external results of no value whatever apart from the moral training we desire to give. But Nature, ever-bountiful, is rich in resources for all who can discover and apply them, let unfavourable conditions be what they will.

The nobler part in these mis-educated children has been practically unrecognised hitherto. Duly appealed to, it will not only respond, but prove stronger than all that degrades or leads astray. We shall have it wholly on our side in all efforts tending upward and onward, and may therefore put away misgivings as to results, of whatever kind. It is in bringing out all that is

best and strongest in children, through close sympathy with themselves, that we shall secure the "influence" which—though less easily defined and traced in its working—is so much more effective than mere coercion, however just in its aim and exercise. This point gained, all else will follow.

The one difficulty at the start is to induce children to think steadily, but the thin end of the wedge may be got in, even here, by taking the right means, used with tact. Before we can talk of self-rule, we must of course teach them something of self-communing, which looks alarming, not to say unnatural, on the face of it. In reality, however, it is nothing more or less than what we all do, involuntarily, to serve our own ends, good, bad, or indifferent, all day long. The lower animals, even, reason with themselves similarly, though in limited degree. What we have to do is—(1) to throw light upon the nature and value of thought-work; (2) to direct it into wholesome channels; and (3) to aid it by the study of expression in words.

Lessons on "Self-rule," as belonging strictly to moral training, may be included amongst "secular" subjects, and taught accordingly, at any time convenient to the teacher, without fear of infringing any "conscience clause." This again points to easement in working, and will be taken advantage of by all who wish in that way to give fuller effect to religious lessons.

"Object-lessons," again (read somewhat liberally), might well be pressed into the service, planned so as to bring out and emphasise self-rule in some way or other. In the illustration and enforcement of morals, would they not indeed prove a best *raison d'être* for that form of instruction?

Whatever method of teaching be adopted, all moral lessons should lead, sooner or later, to definite mental—and verbal—"acts," corresponding to the instruction given, children being led first to commit themselves in agreement with the right, and then to resolve to act upon it, criticism being understood to follow, in due course, and under like conditions. Mutual help (including the giving and taking of criticism) may well be taken into consideration in connection with our special aim, for it is obvious that agreement to practice self-rule in any form—between only a few members of a class, much more general consent—would greatly ease the task to one and all. It is quite conceivable that our pupils might even be led, in time, to adopt penalties for failure in practice—self-imposed, or planned by

common consent, as aiding the effect of resolutions. The disciplinary difficulty will, in any case, be effectually distanced, though reminders would still be needed by children whose home-training was below par, and careful tending, with untiring sympathy, be required by all, in turn, for an indefinite time to come, longer or shorter, according to the attention which, in spite of ordinary "pressure," can be given to the real work.

EXTRACTS, BEARING ON SELF-RULE, FROM THE OLD PHILOSOPHERS.

God hath not only formed you, but given your guardianship to yourself. Will you . . . dishonour the trust?

Have no will but the will of God. . . . Why [otherwise] do you boast of your education? . . . Begin again, convinced that hitherto you have not even touched upon the essential point.

As Zeus converses with himself, . . . and is employed in thoughts worthy of himself, so should we too be able to talk with ourselves, . . . to attend to the divine administration, to consider our relation to other beings, &c.

As bad performers cannot sing alone, but in a chorus, so some persons cannot walk alone. If you are anything, walk alone. . . . Think a little at last; look about you; sift yourself, that you may know what you are.

Seek not good from without: seek it within yourselves, or you will never find it. . . . Train your mental habits to accuracy.

Philosophise a little while by yourself. Fruit is produced thus. The seed must first be buried in the ground, lie hid there some time, and grow up by degrees, that it may come to perfection. . . . Suffer the root to grow; then the first, then the second, then the third joint of the stalk to spring from it; and thus Nature will force out the fruit, whether I will or not. For who that is charged with such principles, but must perceive, too, his own powers, and strive to put them in practice?

Help yourself. . . . Talk with yourself, the person who will most readily be persuaded by you, and with whom no one has greater weight than you. . . . Both ruin and recovery are from within.

A philosopher looks to himself for all help and harm, . . . keeps watch over himself as over an enemy.

Epictetus (as translated by Higginson).

Begin the morning by saying to thyself, "I shall meet with . . . the ungrateful, arrogant, deceitful, . . . but . . . no one can fix on me what is ugly."

We ought . . . to check in the series of our thoughts everything that is . . . useless, . . . over-curious, and . . . malignant.

A man must stand erect, not be kept erect by others.

Men seek retreats for themselves, houses in the country, seashores, and mountains; . . . but . . . it is in thy power whenever thou shalt choose to retire into thyself . . . Constantly then give to thyself this retreat, and renew thyself. . . . Be free, and look at things as a man.

Such as are thy habitual thoughts, such also will be the character of thy mind; for the soul is dyed by the thoughts.

Marcus Aurelius (from Long's translation).

HEADS OF THE WORK.

1. Secure a little time each day for thinking upon it—for both self and pupils.
2. Ease conditions as much as possible by—
 - (a) Studying the comfort of all concerned;
 - (b) Simplifying plans and work;
 - (c) Providing all needful facilities.
3. Put your pupils into a receptive attitude by creating an atmosphere of mutual trust, and awakening interest in the great lesson itself.
4. Let mental, moral, and practical lessons keep pace with each other.
5. Let the teaching be as simple and conversational as possible.

1. However time-tables may differ, all might be so worked as to favour the training to self-rule—*never out of place*, whatever the subject in question. The practice of this could not only be attended to, but would greatly aid both teachers and taught as emphasising the points of conduct most essential to success in study. But for set lessons on self-rule the best and quietest times should be chosen.

2. (a) The fact of trustworthiness would much favour easement of conditions, if only in the removal of restrictions more or less irksome, yet equally inevitable, as things are.

We cannot assume this, but may anticipate it to some extent, by holding the reins somewhat loosely, and putting pupils on probation.

(b) During the earlier stages of moral training it might be well, in some cases, to restrict work to certain subjects only, or at least to conduct all lessons on a plan as nearly uniform as possible, so as to reduce school-ritual to a minimum, and consequently the risk of needless friction.

(c) The due provision and serving of school-apparatus of all kinds is important for the same reason.

3. No training to self-rule would be found practicable in the absence of mutual trust. Should there be any doubt or failure in regard to this vital matter to begin with, no pains must be spared to make good what may be lacking. Obviously, the "lion's share" in any such effort will fall to the teacher; but this need not alarm a true expert; for, any right way taken, the children would be only too happy to respond and follow suit, on being led to trace cause and effect all through.

4. Our aim is a lofty one, and has never yet been done justice to. The practice of self-rule is indeed (in one sense) a simple matter, and has to do with the humblest and homeliest things all day long; but as "kindling of soul" and moulding of will are involved, the work is an onerous one, and will need to be studied and prepared for accordingly. "Mental" work, carefully done, will greatly assist both "moral" and "practical" effort, including not only clear definition of terms used, but full illustration of every kind available, and likely to help and interest the children. Teachers will do well to make a point of gathering good material for such lessons, which, worked up with the skill of one trained to see and to speak, might serve an excellent purpose.

5. When pupils begin to put in remarks and queries of their own, we may be satisfied that we are well on in a right direction—hardly till then.

The main points may be summarised thus:—Steadiness of mind, leading to concentration of thought; resolution; watchfulness, and self-criticism.

Also—co-operation with others; in conference, definite acts of agreement, and mutual help and criticism.